

Red River Trails



by

Grace Flandrau

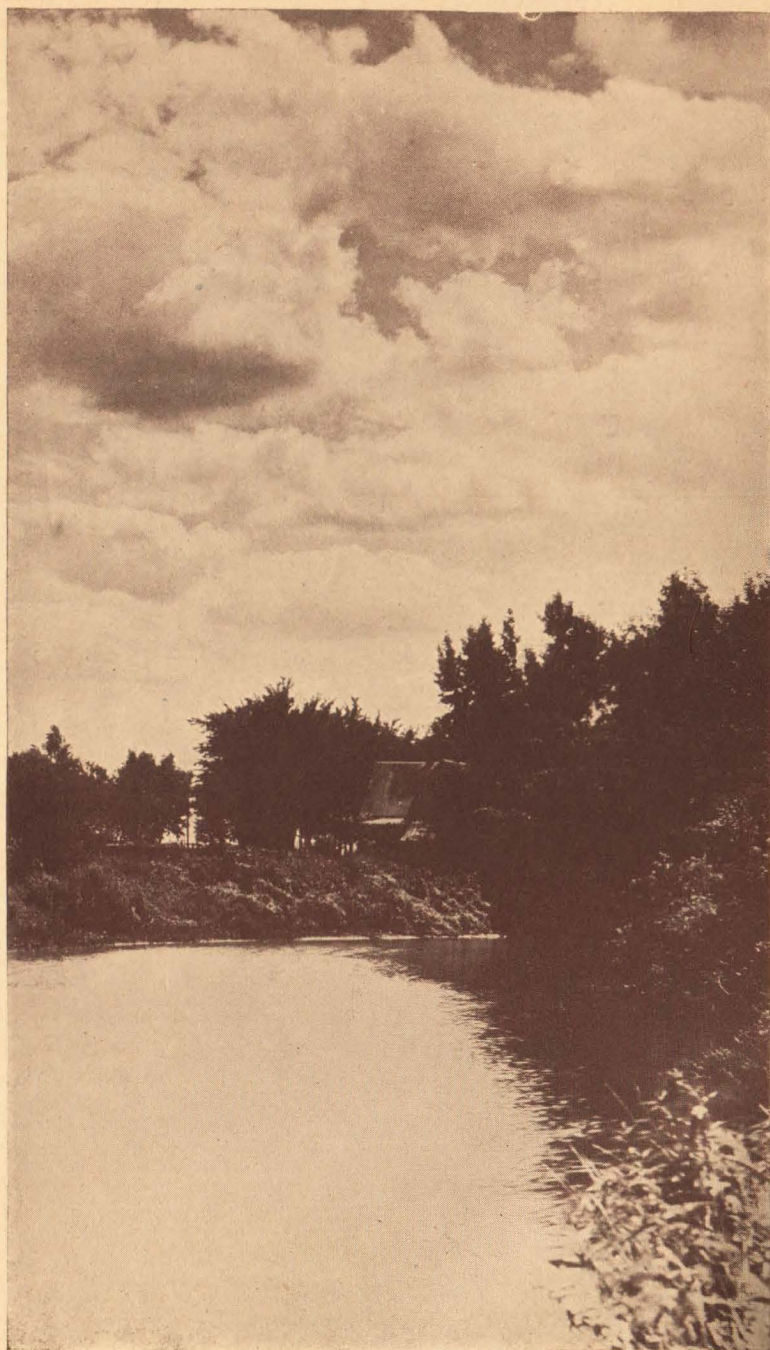
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Compliments of the
Great Northern Railway



The Red River of the North



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Foreword

There is a certain hay meadow in southwestern Minnesota; curiously enough this low-lying bit of prairie, often entirely submerged, happens to be an important height of land dividing the great water sheds of Hudson's Bay and Mississippi river. It lies between two lakes: One of these, the Big Stone, gives rise to the Minnesota river, whose waters slide down the long toboggan of the Mississippi Valley to the Gulf of Mexico; from the other, Lake Traverse, flows the Bois de Sioux, a main tributary of the Red River of the North, which descends for over five hundred miles through one of the richest valleys in the world to Lake Winnipeg and eventually to Hudson's Bay.

In the dim geologic past, the melting of a great glacier ground up limestone and covered this valley with fertile deposits, while the glacial Lake Agassiz subsequently levelled it to a vast flat plain.

Occasionally in spring when the rivers are exceptionally high, the meadow is flooded and becomes a lake. Then a boatman, travelling southward from the semi-arctic Hudson's Bay, could float over the divide and reach the Gulf of Mexico entirely by water route.

The early travellers gave romantic names to the rivers of the West, none more so, it seems to me, than Red River of the North,

with its lonely cadence, its suggestion of evening and the cry of wild birds in far off quiet places. Reality, however, is very remote from the imaginative picture.

Anything less lonely than the Red river valley, where farms, towns and cities and more farms succeed each other along the network of railroads and highways, can scarcely be imagined. As to poetry, while there is plenty of it wherever people live, work, love and die, it is not of the obvious kind. What there is outside the human drama must be looked for in grain elevators, chambers of commerce, model dairy farms; ferretted, if possible, out of gas-driven farm machinery and prize-winning hogs; while astonishing statistics add their wonder to this economic ode. Such is the romance of the Red river of today.

But turn the pages back just a few years, so few that the present becomes almost an impossibility; gone like a dream are the fields, Fords, factories, threshing machines, cement paved streets, twin lines of steel that gleam along the prairie, and the pomp and roar of the locomotive.

Silence reigned over the rich valley—a sea of waving grass through which wound the wooded ribbon of the river, with groves of oak, ash and maple making dark islands in the ocean-like prairie. Beaver choked the tributary streams and flooded the lowlands with their dams; trees standing knee deep in water rotted and died; marsh grass replaced them and the age old process of converting forest to prairie—in which the beaver played no one knows quite how large a part—went on.

Wild swans, ducks, geese, cranes and countless other wild fowl wheeled and nested in the reedy margins feeding on wild rice and celery. Bears were thick in the lightly timbered river bottoms; the night silence broke sadly to the lonely voice of loon and owl, or the hungry wail of wolves. Eastward lay great forests of pine interspersed with lovely openings and blue lakes where red deer whistled and elk bent their proud antlers to the water's edge to drink.

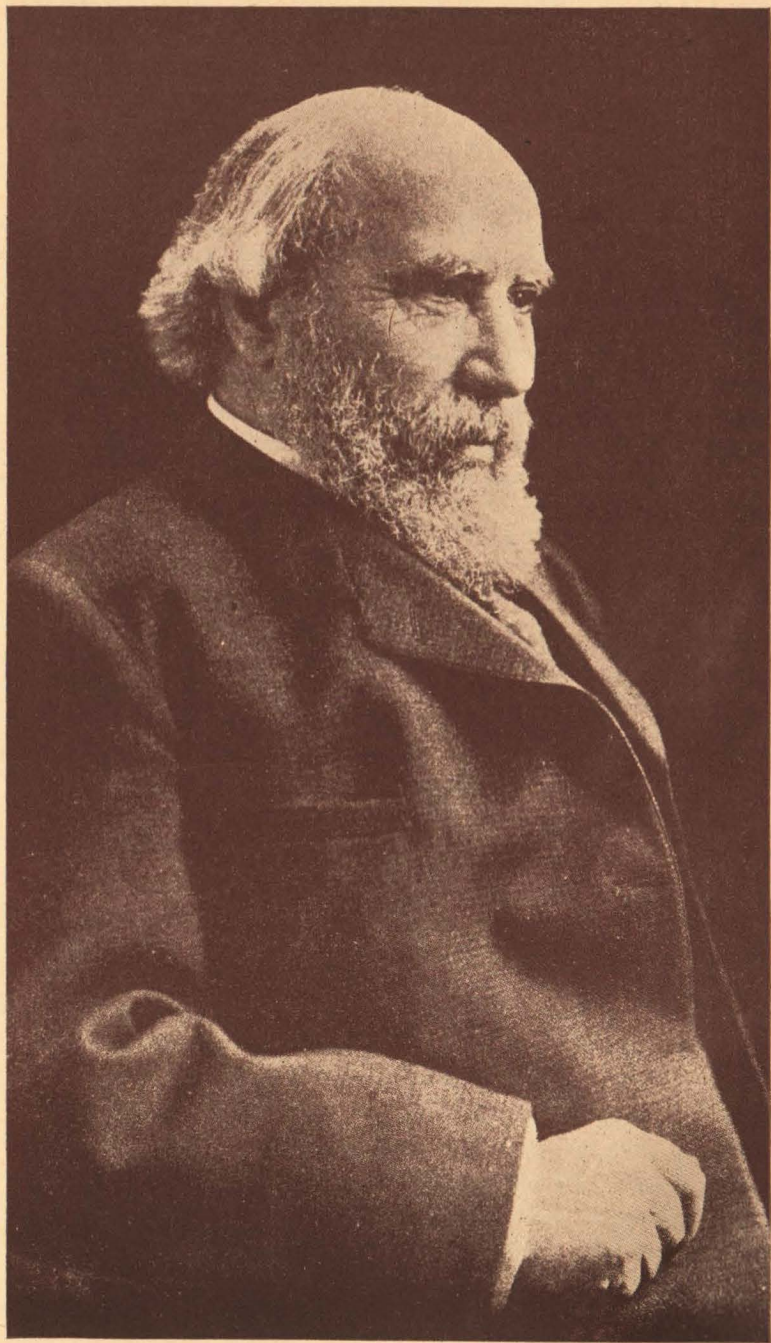
Westward swept the limitless plains, dark with the vanished wonder of the buffalo. In thousands and hundreds of thousands they scattered leisurely to graze, trampling the wild flowers and staining their hoofs with the wild berries that carpeted the prairie; or, stampeding before leaping prairie fire or the onslaught of red hunters, shook the earth with the beat of their myriad hoofs; again, peacefully on the march, they migrated along trails

worn deep by their immemorial passing. In spring the river ran dark with the countless dead which had perished in the ice the previous fall; in late summer the plains rang to the roar and clash of fighting bulls.

On Red river and its tributary streams war canoes of Chippewa and Sioux carried their painted braves on endless errands of savage aggression and revenge.

At rare intervals the virgin sod had yielded to the rude plough of the Indian women—a shoulder bone of elk or buffalo—and small patches of corn had been raised. But the savages lived for the most part on game, fish and the wild fruits and grains which grew in abundance. In spring and fall they ranged the plains for buffalo, in winter retired to their villages scattered among the wooded lakes. Cold locked the river and trackless snow stretched away to the wide unbroken circle of the horizon.





James J. Hill

Red River Trails

While the British colonists along the Atlantic seaboard were still a contented dependency of the Crown, and the Alleghanies a wall beyond which the people of these provinces had not yet passed, the year in which Daniel Boone was born (1734) and George Washington attained the age of two, the history—recorded history, that is to say—of this important valley in the heart of America began.

What the story of the aboriginal races in this region was we shall probably never know; and before proceeding to authentic white man's history it might be of interest to glance at a curious incident or perhaps merely one of those scientific hoaxes which from time to time rock with controversy the serene antiquarian world, and one which concerns this very locality.

In 1898 on the eastern fringe of the Red river valley near the town of Kensington a few miles west of Alexandria, a slab of gray-wacke rock, bearing supposedly an antique Runic inscription was dug up. After a casual examination by certain authorities it was pronounced a forgery and used as a door step on the farm where it had been found.

Ten years later more expert attention was drawn to the stone, the legend deciphered and the thing pronounced by a number of students of ancient Scandinavian script both in the United States and in Europe and by local geologists, to be genuine.

The inscription testified that a band of Norsemen had, in 1362, arrived in Vinland (Nova Scotia or Labrador) sailed westward into Hudson's Bay, left their ship in charge of a part of the crew, and proceeded inland—presumably by the later well-known traders' route along Hayes or Nelson river, Lake Winnipeg and Red River of the North to the first important falls or rapids below Fergus Falls and thence across country to the place where the stone was deposited. Many serious treatises fill many serious Historical Quarterlies, magazines and other publications proving and somewhat violently disproving the fact that the stone is what it purports to be.

There is nothing inherently impossible or even improbable in the voyage itself. It has been established beyond question that Norsemen did at various times after the year 1000 visit the northeast coast of the continent; while many other even more difficult and adventurous inland voyages were accomplished in different parts of the continent.

The linguistic arguments produced by the doubters seem to be adequately answered by the believers, but there is one extraneous factor which seems to me very piquant and peculiarly damning. It involves a rather remarkable brother-in-law of the farmer who found the stone. This brother-in-law was an employee of the Great Northern Railway, a dump foreman, a scholarly adventurer in overalls, learned in Greek, Latin, ancient Swedish literature and folk lore, who left the great University of Upsala to wander in America and who brought Fryxel's historical works and treatises on Runes and facsimiles of Runic alphabets with him from Upsala. This learned individual had a scholarly friend, a deposed Swedish clergyman of even greater erudition than himself. They arrived on the scene of the discovery some fifteen years before the stone was found and amused themselves writing stories in Runic character and reading them to the farmer who was, we are told, also a stone-cutter.

These are facts as set down by Rasmus B. Anderson in a publication of the Wisconsin Historical Society. Anderson, needless to say, is one of those who emphatically doubt the authenticity of the stone.

So we may leave the matter in what seems to me a very quaint status—two groups of eminent authorities in the lore of antiquity almost equally divided as to whether a carved stone picked up on the edge of Red river valley is the extraordinarily clever forgery of an ex-clergyman and a Great Northern dump boss, or one of the most significant records of early exploration ever found in America!

Outside of this cloudland of dubious speculation we have no definite knowledge of white men on Red river until 1734.

Long before that time, Frenchmen, with that passionate impulse toward exploration and discovery which characterizes their period of conquest in America, had paddled their bark canoes up the Great Lakes, along tributary streams to rivers flowing into the Mississippi, had explored that river from St. Anthony Falls to the Gulf of Mexico, built fur trading and military posts and

missions on Lake Pepin, the extreme western shores of Lake Superior, penetrated through the chain of lake and rivers forming the northern border of Minnesota, possibly as far west as Lake Winnipeg; they had also ascended the Missouri from St. Louis almost to the Mandan villages.

The profits of the fur trade, propagation of the Faith, or the hope of discovering an overland passage to the ocean which links our coast with the Orient, were the more definite motives back of this restless advance into the unknown immensities of the West.

Although we have no positive evidence of their presence on Red river until 1734, it is quite possible that during the previous century, when a flotilla of Cree or Ojibway canoes floated light as leaves along the wild shores of Lake Winnipeg and turned southward up the waters of the Red, some Frenchman from Three Rivers or Lachine, a thousand miles eastward on the St. Lawrence, knelt to the paddle beside the savages, shot buffalo, wild swan and Sioux, camped in the bark lodges on the edge of wild rice swamps, trapped beaver at the mouth of Pembina or Red Lake rivers. The continent is laced with the shadowy trails of these unrecorded travellers who passed like a prophecy through the remotest fastnesses of the savage world.

Certain it is that a portion of the Red River of the North was accurately traced on the Franquelin map of 1688, almost half a century before the accredited discoverers of this river started on their westward quest. It may have been placed there only by Indian hearsay, but it was known to the Verendryes when they reached the verge of the known world in 1733.

The Sieur de la Verendrye, one of the greatest of the French explorers, commanded very considerable expeditions; these consisted of his sons, his nephew La Jemmerai, various associates, an occasional priest, at one time a company of soldiers and always a large number of voyageurs.

In the spring of 1734, a band of Indians from Lake Winnipeg and the Red river district arrived at Verendrye's post on Lake of the Woods, beyond which the explorer had not yet advanced. They brought him gifts, among them a slave "with a necklace," and their mission was to urge him to establish a trading station among them. Verendrye, who had long planned to invade that region, sent two Frenchmen to find a suitable place for a post at the mouth of "Red" river.

"It was doubtless called Red," observes a later traveller, "because its color is a whitey brown." Others less facetious say the Indians gave it this name because of the color of its waters when ruffled by the wind, or because it was supposed by them to flow from Red Lake.

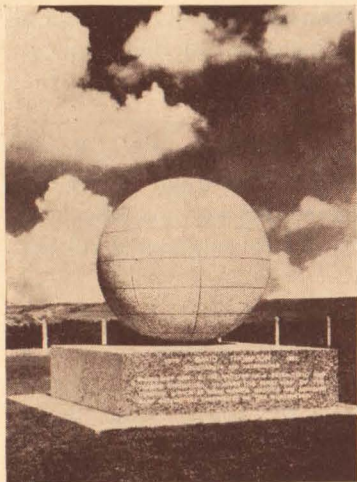
These unnamed voyageurs despatched by Verendrye made the authentic discovery of the Red River of the North. On their return a suitable party was sent to its mouth to build a post and were later joined by the leader's eldest son, Jean Baptiste.

From Verendrye's own map of 1737 it would seem that within the next year or so members of his party ascended Red River to and beyond the present International border, establishing a temporary post called Fort Pointe des Bois at the mouth of Goose river. Another fort was built by the expedition at the mouth of the Assiniboine where the city of Winnipeg now stands and still another near the mouth of Roseaux river. All of these Red river posts were occupied but a very short time and considerable uncertainty exists as to their exact whereabouts.

The Verendryes were poor diarists, or else many of their writings have been lost. As to these first recorded journeys on Red river, we have only the briefest references.

Beside one or another of the leaders, and the forest toughened, matchlessly skilled boatmen who manned the canoes, a band of friendly Indians usually accompanied the various expeditions sent from the main bases to establish smaller posts.

A stockade of cottonwood logs was hastily thrown up about a sod-roofed hut, the lovely cone shaped lodges of the wild clientele clustered in the vicinity, and a small center of commercial activity erupted upon the majestic savagery of the silent primordial world—as far reaching in its consequences as the march of conquering armies. Such was the beginning of trade on the Red River of the North almost two hundred years ago.



*Thompson Monument at
Verendrye, N. D.*

The scene—enacted in every part of the wild continent—never fails of its significant and picturesque appeal. A small group of fearless, watchful white adventurers, brave as the savages and craftier than they—adults among a vast horde of primitive children, relying for their ascendancy, for their safety and their very lives, upon this difference in mental age; the display of gewgaws, of wonder-working weapons and implements so marvellous and so desirable to the stone age men and women—guns, lead, powder, sharp knives, precious tomahawks, copper kettles, needles, awls, beads and blankets—all to be bought for a few packs of glossy beaver, mink and muskrat skins.

Wisely those early wanderers observed and humored the Indian love of pomp and pageantry. With songs and dancing and wild religious or symbolic rites, every act of savage life was celebrated; the ceremonial pipe sealed all social contracts and propitiated the gods. The white men responded with equal formality and most astounding oratorical efforts have come down to us, with which they harangued the Indians and extended over them the gracious domination of whatever Christian monarch they happened to represent—a suzerainty at first welcomed with tears and prayers of thanksgiving by the unknowing savages—repented with helpless bitterness in later years.

The Red river valley was the extreme western battlefield of the Chippewa gradually advancing from the east and the fiercely retreating Sioux. The Chippewa and their cousins the Crees, who occupied the more northerly part of that region, were woods Indians, and the forest bred darker and more excessive superstitions than the plains. It is too bad the Verendryes should not have recorded the barbaric celebrations with which we know these savages must have welcomed the first white strangers who so happily brought guns and scalping knives to their very doors.

La Verendrye was explorer at heart, trader only by the painful



Schoolcraft's History of American Indians
Indian Council

necessity of making his expeditions self-supporting. He had with passionate fidelity dedicated himself, his sons and all he possessed to the discovery for France of the overland passage to the western sea. He did not linger on Red river; it flowed from the south, while it was the secret of the West which called him. He soon pressed forward on the great quest and the eager vegetation of the lowlands overran the mouldering forts.

Since it has been a question of Rune stones, we should perhaps touch on another find somewhat less open to suspicion, made by the Verendryes. In his book of travel published in 1772, the Swedish botanist, Kalm, records a conversation held with La Verendrye in Quebec in 1749. Verendrye told him of a small pillar-like stone inscribed with strange characters found on the Northwestern plains, where so far as was known no white men ever had preceded them. The Verendryes carried this stone to Quebec where it was examined by learned monks who believed that the characters, which were letters not the pictographs of American Indians, were Tartarian. The stone was sent to France to the Count de Maurepas, Minister of Marine; French savants could not decipher the legend and Kalm advances the theory that it was not in Tartar script but was an inscription in Norse runes, of which there was no knowledge at that time in France.

West of where the stone was found were "Indians who lived in little houses of earth" (Mandans), which possibly establishes the place of discovery as the Red river valley. If this tablet, which it seems reasonable to believe did at one time exist, could be found, extremely interesting light might be thrown on the matter of Norse explorations in the heart of America, and possibly on the alleged European characteristics of the Mandans. It is said that these Indians believed in a Hell that was eternally cold, a belief current in certain parts of Scandinavia in ancient times; that they had knowledge of the decimal system which had reached Norway by the thirteenth century and that their hair and eyes were markedly lighter than those of other tribes.

Catlin gave them European ancestry through the entirely mythical migration of a band of Welchmen to America in the eleventh century; but the Welch were brown-eyed and the blue eyes of the Mandans are at the bottom of all the speculation! An interesting and extravagant field for fancy, but one which might cease to be fanciful if the Verendrye tablet could be re-discovered in France.

Rival Companies

In 1762-63 France lost all of her Empire in America; Louisiana east of the Mississippi fell to England; while the western portion had been ceded to Spain the year before. How much of the Red river valley was English, how much Spanish cannot definitely be stated. The northwest boundary of Louisiana was never defined.¹

At any rate the Spaniards never approached this possible northern portion of their domain, nor did the Hudson's Bay Company for many years assert any supremacy; but shortly after the fall of New France, Scotch traders from Montreal began to penetrate northern Minnesota, the Red river valley and the remoter northwestern regions explored by the French.

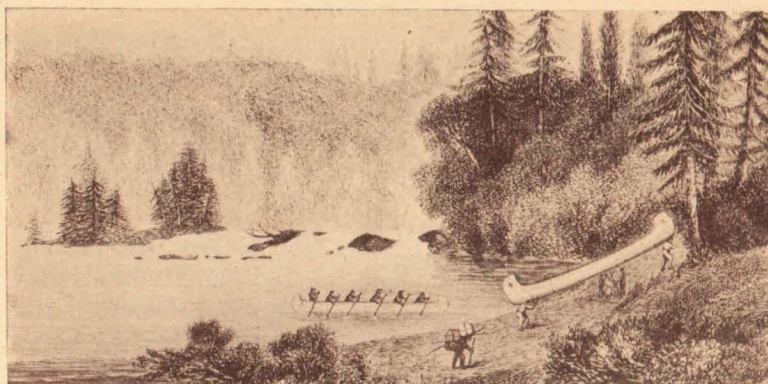
The first British post to appear on Red river was built by Joseph Frobisher in 1764, just below what are now known as St. Andrews Rapids on the lower river. It was only occupied a short time and although traders continued to visit this region during the next thirty years, no other fort was built until 1794, when Peter Grant established a trading station on the east bank of Red river just south of the International Boundary. (The present town of St. Vincent on the Great Northern Railway.)

A considerable trading party under Cadotte, coming from the upper Mississippi country, had already approached and descended Red river from the south; and we read of the rascally American trader—later a Northwester—called Peter Pond, in the extreme upper valley almost a quarter of a century before that.

In 1797 a second North West company post was established across the river from St. Vincent. It was built at the mouth of Panbian, now Pembina river—a point ever after of great importance in the history of the valley and where the town of Pembina, North Dakota, now is. At this station the year after its establishment, David Thompson, the great English astronomer and cartographer, was received. He was travelling eastward on a surveying expedition through northern Minnesota, when he made the first recorded surveys of the upper Mississippi.

Later the Pembina post was rebuilt by Alexander Henry, one of the great diarists of the fur trade, and became chief distributing center for the entire district.

¹See Greenhow's excellent "Memoir Historical and Political of the Northwest Coast of North America." Pp. 150-151-216.



From History of the Red River

Fur Traders Making a Portage

The theoretic or legal rights of the Hudson's Bay Company to a monopoly of trade on Red river—rights which they had no means of enforcing—were superbly ignored by the Northwesters, and the feudal overlords were forced to obtain what part of it they could by cut-throat competition with the usurpers. Posts of both companies and soon, to make matters worse, those of a third organization known as the XY company multiplied along the valley. Like many of the early trading houses they were built at the forks of the river then the most convenient avenues of traffic. Henry's first post stood at the mouth of Park river, so called because an Indian park or enclosed pound to trap buffalo had been located there; but he soon established permanent headquarters 35 miles below at Pembina. The mouth of Red Lake river or the Grandes Fourches as it was called—now the city of East Grand Forks—was an important commercial center during all the period of British occupation. Hudson's Bay and northwest traders were both established there after 1803.

A period of violent and ruinous rivalry followed and the murderous excesses of the liquor traffic at Red river posts have never been equalled in the history of the fur trade. With unparalleled cynicism some of the traders, notably Alexander Henry, set forth the details of the horrors for which this dealing was responsible.

Men, women and children drank the alcohol supplied to them by the gallon and hogshead. Fathers killed their own children,

sons split their mothers' heads with axes; husbands stabbed their wives; women bit off noses, fell in the fire and were roasted, attacked and slew their families.

When liquor did not serve their purpose, rival traders stooped to every form of corruption and even to physical violence to prevent the furs from reaching the opposition posts. (A somewhat similar condition had existed before the formation of the Northwest company, when the Scotch merchants were fighting each other as ruthlessly as, after uniting, they fought all other rivals.)

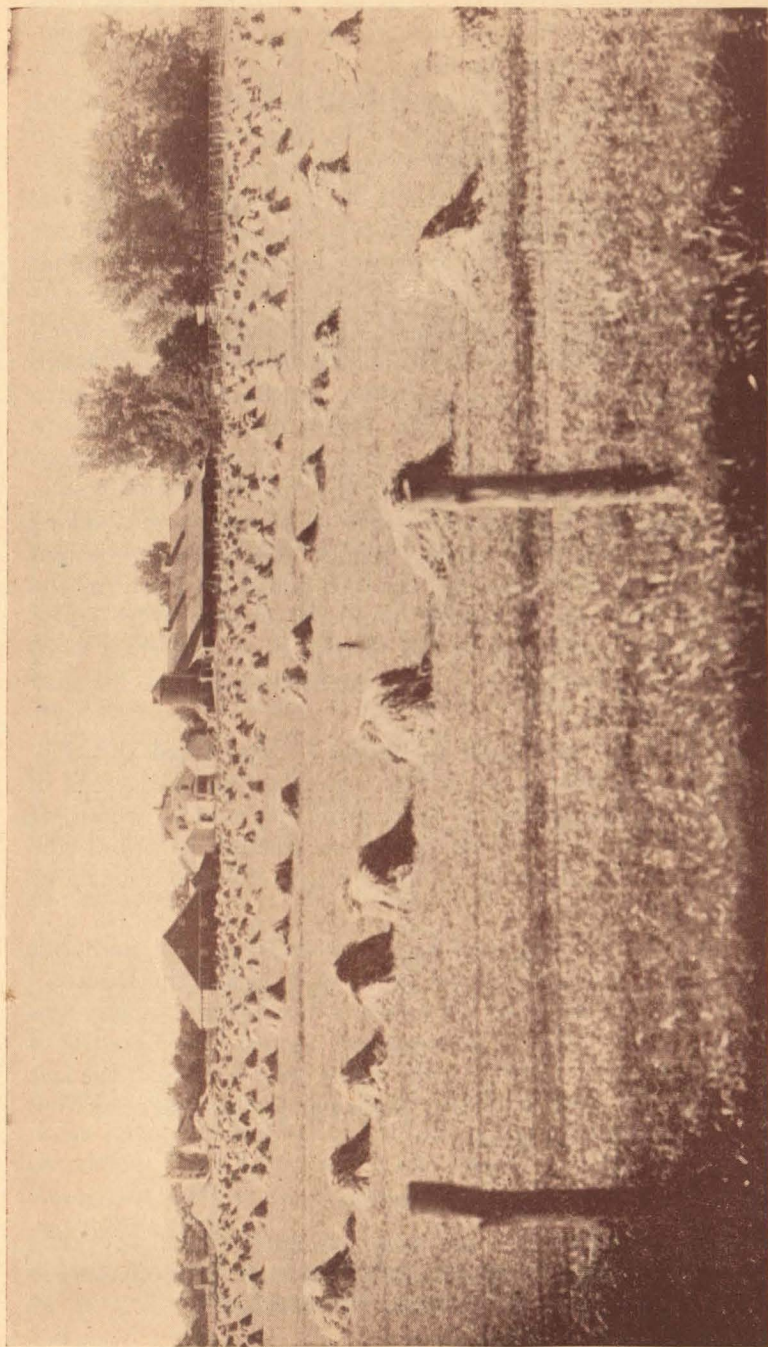
There were among the Indians at this time leaders of enough intelligence and character to see and attempt to put an end to the consequent ruin and degradation, and they united to drive the white men from the country. But a dreadful ally came to the aid of the whites. From the Missouri rode the pale horseman of the Apocalypse. Smallpox attacked these wild people, who had achieved no immunity against it, and swept among them a very demon of death. Whole villages died of it and with no one to bury them lay till their bones bleached in the wind torn and weatherbeaten lodges. An early writer states that a furrow could scarcely be turned along Red river without uncovering the bones of the countless Indians who perished during this plague.

How can we, who boast of superior culture and certainly possessed wider experience and more sophisticated minds, sit in judgment on any crimes of those primitive men to whom we brought liquor and disease, whom we corrupted, robbed and often killed with no more compunction than the wild animals we thought they were!

In 1804 the Northwesters absorbed the rival XY and thus reinforced, they rapidly gained in the race against the Hudson's Bay Company. By 1810 the credit of the latter company was so reduced that it was possible for one man to obtain control of the entire organization—a matter which proved to be of the first importance not only to the fur trade but to the history of Red river and of the Northwest.

Occupation

We now come to one of the most distinguished and appealing of the many unusual personalities who wrote, in their effect upon the Red river valley, the history of two nations.

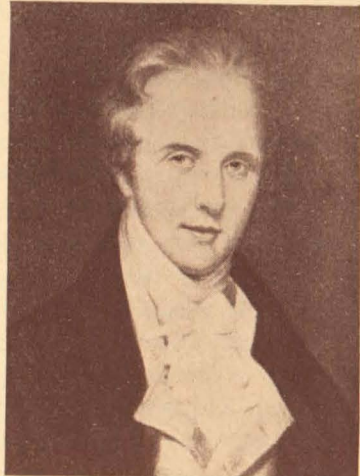


A Red River Wheat Field

There was at that time a young aristocrat in Scotland, Thomas Douglas, Earl of Selkirk, who like so many of his class in Great Britain, was an idealist and a liberal almost to the point of radicalism. The excesses of the French Revolution cured him of his more extreme theories but not of his passionate concern with the wrongs and sufferings of the poor. The Napoleonic wars and unregulated industrial conditions in the British Isles created much poverty and the evictions of Highland peasants from their small holdings to make room for the great sheep ranches caused the situation in Scotland to be particularly difficult.

Selkirk was not one of those who can remain unmoved and indifferent in the face of wide spread misery. He turned his attention to the subject of emigration on which he wrote an authoritative work; and translating his sympathies and theories into action, gathered up a band of his destitute countrymen in 1803 and shipped them to Prince Edward's Island on the Gulf of St. Lawrence. His real interest in the New World, however, lay elsewhere, and was awakened, he writes, by a book published a year or two before in England.

In 1793 Sir Alexander McKenzie, fur trader, made the first overland northwest passage to the Pacific coast. His account of this trip contained much material on Rupert's Land and the rich valley of the Red River of the North, and it so fascinated the benevolent Earl that he determined to establish a modern Utopia in the wilderness Eden. He was undismayed by the fact that Red river valley was separated from the civilized Canada of the St. Lawrence by a thousand miles of turbulent stream, stormy lake and difficult portage, through a forest region known only to savages and the dauntless adventurers of the fur trade; from Hudson's Bay by an exceedingly difficult canoe route of seven hundred miles; while southward the nearest settlements were a trading post at Prairie du Chien on the Mississippi and the far off village of St. Louis.



From Painting at St. Mary's Isle

Thomas Douglas, Earl of Selkirk

Relying on the purely legal character of the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly in the Red river valley, where the North-westerners had so confidently established themselves, Selkirk bought the controlling interest in the former organization and obtained a grant of over 100,000 square miles along Red river from the Grandes Fourches (Grand Forks) to Lake Winnipeg, and westward to the head waters of the Assiniboine; extinguished Indian titles by a money payment and promise of annuities. To this vast estate as large—even after that portion of it which lay in the United States was subtracted—as Georgia, and to which he gave the name of Assiniboia, Selkirk despatched in 1811 a boatload of evicted Scotchmen with their families. They landed on the inhospitable shores of Hudson's Bay and made the long journey southward by canoe to the site of the present city of Winnipeg. There the weary, ragged band were confronted by the very immediate threat of starvation. The nearest community was at Pembina, whither they journeyed and where they spent a terrible winter dependent on the mercy of the North West company traders and on the charity of Indians and half breeds, after clothes, shoes, even wedding rings had been sold for a bit of pemmican, a fish, or a frozen blackbird.

But look well at that handful of Scotchmen freezing and starving on the wintry shores of the Red River of the North at Pembina. They are as significant as the handful of Pilgrims who offered their first prayer on Plymouth Rock, or the first great prairie wagon train that moved to Oregon; for they were the beginning of the Northwest, of its settlement, its agriculture, its cities and its permanent development. The region, the progress of which they inaugurated, was as big as Europe; it reached from Lake Superior to the Pacific, from the frozen muskrat sloughs of the Arctic sea to the remote settlements on the lower Missouri.

In all this domain they had been preceded only by the fur trade, and the fur trade is transitory and destructive; when it has cleared streams and forests of their living treasure it moves away leaving the country denuded and unimproved. Its very existence, of course, depends on keeping the wilderness wild, and here on Red river, as elsewhere, it was to prove the sworn enemy of settlement.

When the Selkirkers first arrived the astonished Northwesterners could scarcely believe their eyes. No one would be mad enough to attempt to settle a region thousands of miles from nowhere.

Furs are light and valuable; a small fortune can be transported in one fragile barque, whereas wheat, corn and manufactured articles require closer markets and other transportation than dog sled or frail canoe. Especially no one would be mad enough to thrust destructive agriculturists into a savage sanctuary looked upon by the doughty "Pedlars" as peculiarly their own.

It took them a year and the added proof of a second band of immigrants sent out by Selkirk, to realize that this was no fly-by-night scheme, which would perish of its own extravagant impracticability.

Then war began, a war in which a British officer, governor of the new colony, and twenty of his staff were shot down by half breed allies of the Northwesters, and the unfortunate colonists scattered again and again by the ruthless persecutions of that company, to winter at Pembina (where in 1812 they built Fort Daer) or on the bleak shores of Lake Winnipeg, at Norway House.

But nothing is so imperishable as an idea and Selkirk's triumphed at last, although he did not live to see it. Obligated to march to the defense of his colonists at the head of a band of Swiss mercenaries hired by him, attacked as cruelly in the North West Company-owned courts of Canada as his people were on Red river, he went back to Europe in 1818 harassed, heartsore and in ill health, and two years later he died.

The year following Selkirk's death the two companies, all but bankrupt by their incessant warfare, united. The older organization absorbed the younger and with the Hudson's Bay Company supreme, better things began in the fur country.

For many years, however, the settlers on Red river had a hard struggle against the difficulties inherent in their situation, the terrible isolation and lack of adequate means of transport, the long bitter winters, the lingering forces of Nature unsubdued—grasshoppers, floods, rats and the greed of the myriads of passenger pigeons which swept the Mississippi and Red river valleys in numbers so fabulous as almost not to be believed.

Gypsies of the North

Side by side with the thrifty Scotch husbandmen, who toiled so patiently over their virgin fields with inadequate implements, offered up their Gaelic prayers and created along the shores of Red river a miniature Scotland, a distinct and curious people gathered and created a special way of life.



Harper's New Monthly Magazine

Pembina

They were the "free people" of Canada, the Métis or Bois Brûlés, a race born of the fur trade and in whose veins the blood of French, Orkney Islanders and English mingled with that of every Indian race from the lower St. Lawrence to the Arctic sea and from the Sault de Sainte Marie to the eastern slopes of the Rockies. Many of these were retired or discharged servants of both companies. White officials, no longer in active service, often married to Indian or half Indian women, also gathered about the little nucleus of civilized life on Red river.

I know of no other place in the country outside of Spanish America, except in a limited region of Northwestern Canada, where people of mixed white and Indian blood were in great enough proportion to establish themselves as a distinct people with manners and character apart. This happened on Red river and is one of the most interesting features of the ever absorbing story of the valley.

In the picture of this people bright with color, heavily shadowed with pathos, the mingled simplicity, squalor, adventure, gayety and romance weave a brief and unforgettable pattern.

Ignorant, superstitious, pleasure loving, indolent except when it was a question of the fatigues and excitement of the hunt, with dusky skin which gave them their name of Bois Brûlés, flashing eyes and vivid smile, native grace and courtesy of manner, immense physical strength and endurance, with the lilt of fiddle and rhythm of boat song inherited from voyageur ancestor, they pass before us, a people whose consciousness of race rights



Harper's New Monthly Magazine

Bois Brûlé Boys

and an indigentous place, lifted them years later to a futile, childish and none the less tragic effort to become a nation.

Like their red forefathers, one of whose hells was a place where men must perpetually work, they had no liking or capacity for drudgery. Their life centered about and depended upon the buffalo.

In this part of the West the great buffalo ranges were south of the border and west from Pembina. Twice each year the Métis from all the surrounding region closed their cabins, packed up families and belongings and gathered at this place to form the brigades which went westward to the hunt.

A blue Hudson's Bay capot spangled with great brass buttons and bound with a gay sash, leather shirt, leggings, moccasins and many articles of Indian finery was the Métis costume, susceptible of every kind of variation. The women wore semi-civilized dress with native leggings, moccasins and inevitable blanket pulled close about their shoulders.

The vehicle was the Red river cart, which has been in use in the valley since and probably before the beginning of the century. Patterned somewhat after ancient peasant carts of Normandy, it testifies to the French descent of its inventors and was an interesting product of the locality, admirably suited to its needs and limitations. Freight car and family carriage of a growing community for three-quarters of a century, it supplanted in some places the traditional canoe and opened up, as we shall see, an important new way of egress from Red river valley.

All that was needed in the manufacture of this vehicle was a musket with which to shoot an elk or buffalo, and an axe to cut down—and cut up—a tree. Light wooden box, strong wooden axle, two enormous wooden wheels and a pair of shafts, the various parts fastened together with rawhide thongs—this was the Red river cart which carried from 700 to 1,000 pounds over the nightmare roads of the period. When streams were too deep to ford the great dished wheels lashed together and covered with rawhide, made a flat boat on which cargo box was loaded and ferried across, men and animals swimming the current. The great length of the spoke was useful in reaching solid bottom in mud holes and sloughs.

There were no springs to flatter with effete luxury the unfortunate passengers; no grease on the wooden axle to mitigate the incessant screech which echoes shrilly through the records of that time. Usually an ox, sometimes an Indian pony, or even a cow, all were in use as motive power; twenty miles a day the average rate of speed.

When all the hunters had assembled at Pembina, the rules of the hunt were decided upon and the caravan—one of which, of by no means unusual size, is described as consisting of 1,000 carts, 800 horses, 500 oxen, 400 armed men, 800 women and children, 200 train dogs and an indefinite number of curs—set out for the buffalo ranges.



Harper's New Monthly Magazine
Captains of Trains

Cooking utensils, bedding, tent poles and cover, provisions, babies and puppies were all tucked away in the cart under the swaying canvas top. Women walked alongside, driving the oxen; the men rode usually inferior horses, keeping their crack buffalo runners fresh for the hunt.

Anywhere across the rolling plains of North Dakota where the line of the Great Northern Railway stretches westward from Red river, especially in the vicinity of Devil's Lake or Fort

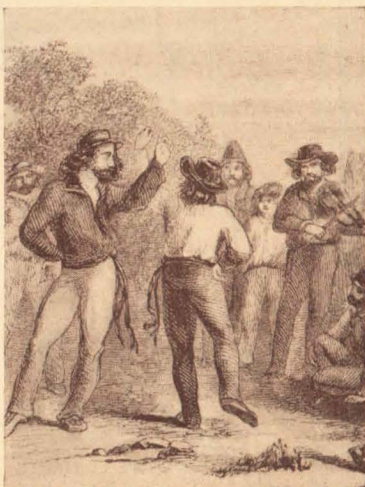
Union and even beyond the border into Montana, the great trains of these gypsies of the North might have been seen. The carts moved generally single file dragging a long serpentine of dust across the wide plains, or when in the vicinity of Sioux war parties, formed three columns and proceeded abreast.

The hunt was conducted under strict rules, decided upon at the rendezvous. The camp was divided into bands, each with its own captain, all of whom were subordinate to a general commander. Some of the restrictions were as follows:

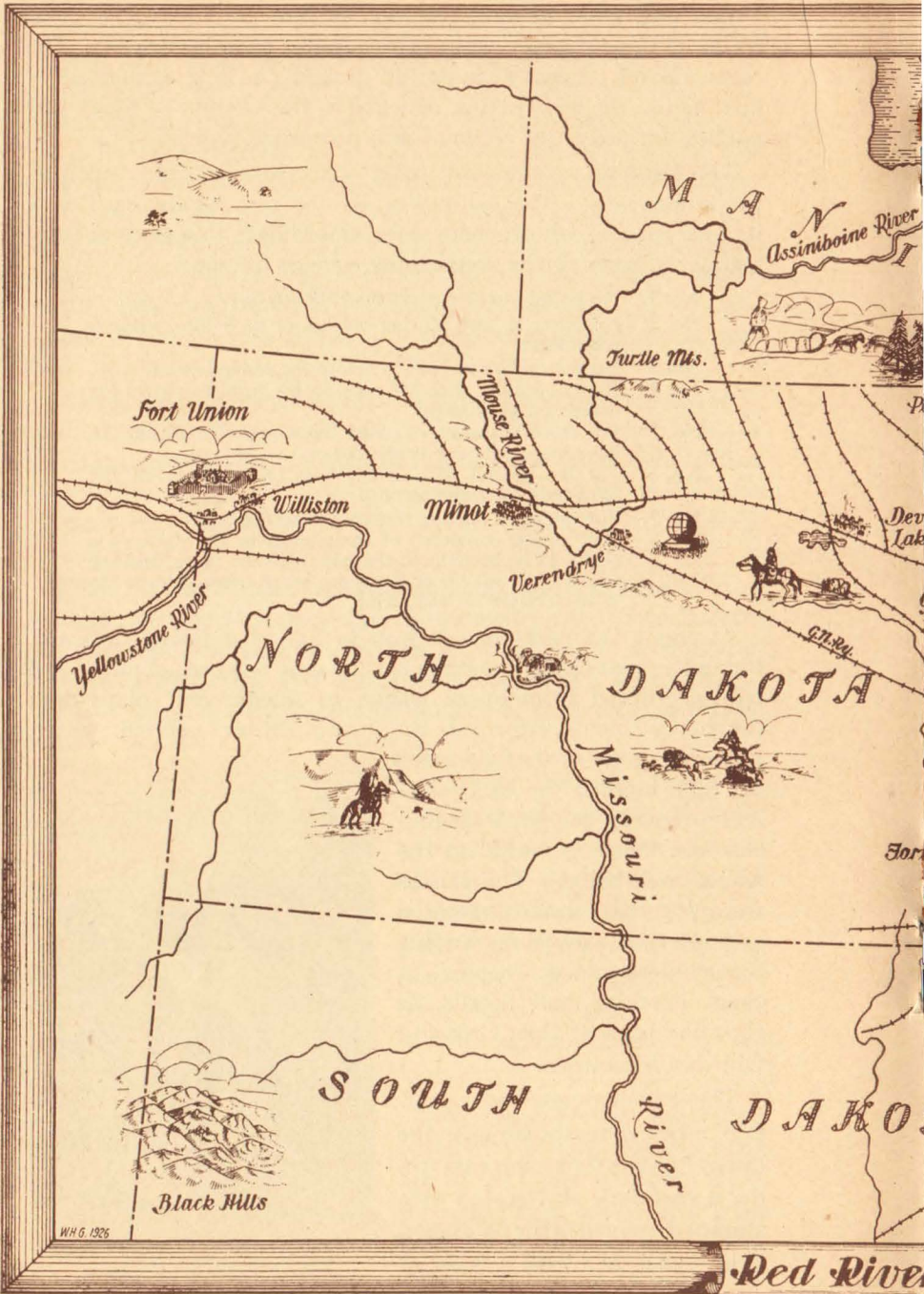
- No. 1. No buffalo to be run on the Sabbath day.
- No. 2. No party to fork off, lag behind, or go before, without permission.
- No. 3. No person to run buffalo before the general order.
- No. 4. Every captain, with his men, in his turn, to patrol the camp and keep guard.
- No. 5. For the first trespass against these laws, the offender to have his saddle and bridle cut up.
- No. 6. For the second offense, the coat to be taken off the offender's back and cut up.
- No. 7. For the third offense, offender to be flogged.
- No. 8. Any person convicted of theft, even to the value of a sinew, to be brought to the middle of the camp, and the crier to call out his or her name three times, adding the word 'THIEF' at each time.

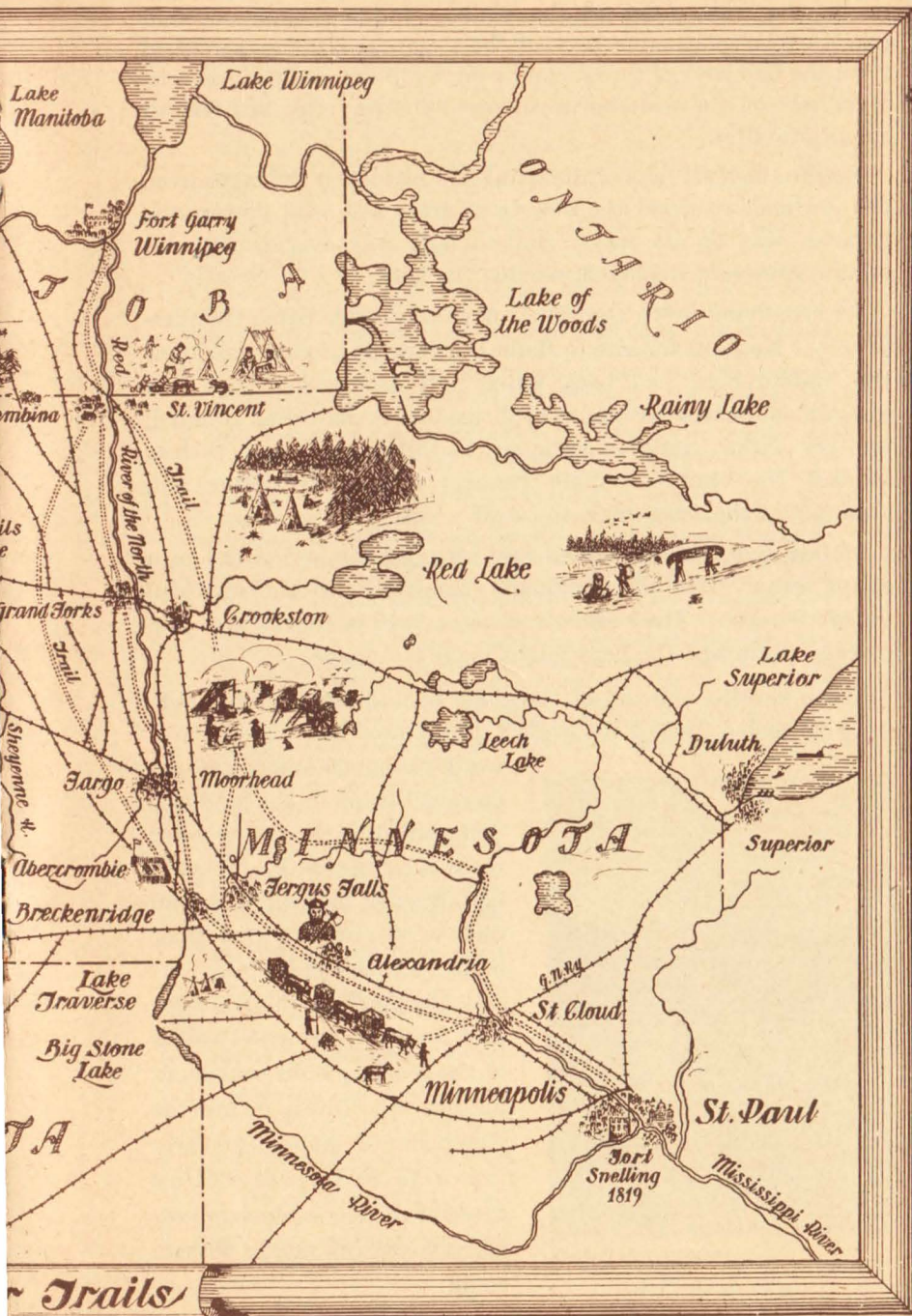
At night the carts placed hub to hub and facing outward, formed a great circle, the tents closing it at one end; children and babies erupted from every wagon to scream and play; dogs fought; women performed the camp duties, carried water, gathered wood or buffalo chips for fuel, kindled the camp fires and prepared the fried pemmican and tea so essential to the Métis' well-being. The horses were picketed and men appointed to guard them against marauding Sioux—determined foemen of these Pembina half breeds, as they had been of their Cree and Ojibway forefathers.

The evening meal over, buffalo robes were spread and the dusky hunters took their ease under a vast dark sky frosted with stars or dissolved in the pale moon light which fills with a peculiar



Harper's New Monthly Magazine
The Evening's Entertainment





magic the wide peace of the plains. Fiddles came out and ancient folk songs from beyond the seas rose clear and musical from the half savage throats and wild, childlike, untamed hearts. Remotely on the wide horizon glowed the wavering red ring of the prairie fires.

Before the level rays of the rising sun had lifted the mists from the lowlands or dried the dew from grass and wild flowers the caravan was on its way. Buffalo sign was everywhere and scouts cautiously deployed, seeking the herd.

At last flying down the slope of a long ridge came the messenger. Needless for him to shout the news he brought; all knew the buffalo herd had been found and excitement tense but disciplined flamed through the brigade. A halt was ordered, hunters threw aside superfluous clothing, tightened sashes, saddled the trained buffalo runners already trembling and straining in their eagerness to be off.

Within five minutes armed and stripped for action the men swept away. Not for a moment, however, did the watchful vigilance relax. The buffalo too, were swift and crafty; a premature alarm and the herd might make its escape.

When nearing the top of the ridge behind which the buffalo were concealed, two of the leaders dismounted and crawling for-

ward on hands and knees, examined the lay of the land and determined upon the wisest method of attack. Then a half dozen of the swiftest horsemen were sent round their flank to turn the buffalo. At first the startled animals huddled together, cows and calves in the center, bulls surrounding them. Then came the stampede. I shall let an early visitor to Red river valley describe the scene which followed, as no one but an eye witness could:



Photo by L. A. Huffman

Buffalo on the Plains

"The three hundred and fifty horsemen came flying over the ridge and down its slope in full pursuit, and in front of them all, not a quarter of a mile away, a herd of near a thousand buffaloes in headlong flight, tails out, heads down, and nostrils red and flaring. For the first few hundred yards the chase was "nip and tuck." The buffaloes were doing their best possible, as they always can at the beginning of a chase, and the horses had not so good ground, and were hardly settled down to their work. But soon the tremendous strides of the buffalo-runners began to tell in the chase, and the heavy headlong and forehanded leap of the buffalo to grow just perceptibly slacker. One after another the swiftest of the runners caught up to the herd, and soon hunters and hunted were one indistinguishable mass thundering over the plain. The green sward is torn up, clouds of dust arise, swift shots like volleys of musketry buffet the air, the hunters fly along with loosened rein, trusting to their horses to clear the badger holes that here and there break the ground, and to keep their own flanks and the rider's legs from the horns of the buffaloes by whom they must pass to get alongside the fat and swifter cow singled out for prey. And still they keep up this tremendous gait, flying buffalo and pursuing horsemen. As fast as one fires he draws the plug of his powder-horn with his teeth, pours in a hasty charge, takes one from his mouthful of wet bullets and drops it without wadding or rammer upon the powder, settles it with a blow against the saddle, keeps the muzzle lifted till he is close to his game, then lowers and fires in the same instant without an aim, the muzzle of the gun often grazing the shaggy monster's side; then leaning off, his horse wheels away, and loading as he flies, he spurs on in chase of another, and another, and another; and in like manner the three hundred of them. One after one the buffaloes lagged behind, staggered, and fell, at first singly and then by scores, till in a few moments the whole herd was slain save only a few old bulls not worth the killing, which were suffered to gallop safely away. One after one the hunters drew rein, and dismounting from their drenched horses, walked back through the heaps of dead buffalo and the puddles of blood, singling out of the hundreds dead with unerring certainty the ones they had shot. Not a dispute arose among the hunters as to the ownership of any buffalo killed. To a novice in the hunt they all looked alike, differenced only by size and sex, and the plain on which all were lying was in each square rod the facsimile of every other square. The novices had thrown on their killed a sash or coat or knife-sheath; but the best hunters had no need of this. To their keen eyes no two rods were alike, and they could trace their course as easily as if only four and not thousands of hoofs had torn the plain.

The carts driven by the women come up, knives are drawn, and with marvelous dexterity the shaggy skins are stripped off, the great, bloody frame divided, huge bones and quivering flesh,



Schoolcrafts History of American Indians

Dressing a Buffalo Skin



The Red River of the North Flows Between Tree-Clad Banks

all cut, into pieces of portable size, the carts loaded, and by sunset all are on their way to camp."

For days the camp was the scene of sanguinary activity; hides were pegged to the ground and scraped, cured with the hair on or peeled for leather according to the season; the meat was cut into thin strips, sun dried or smoked and pounded into a powder. Rawhide bags were filled with this powder and hot buffalo grease poured over it. The result was pemmican, the staple diet of the plains. The fat hardened, the bags were sewed with buffalo sinew and a highly nourishing food, which would keep indefinitely, was obtained in a form peculiarly available for the limited means of transportation. Occasionally service berries or other small fruits were added to it making berry pemmican, which was considered a great delicacy by the frontiersmen, though travellers with less hardened palates described all pemmican as very much resembling a diet of tallow candles. One enthusiast writes that without it the Hudson's Bay Company could not have functioned, life could not have been maintained in the wilderness, the West never have been explored. However that may be pemmican figures prominently in the records of the West from the very dawn of exploration and discovery and drops into oblivion with the vanishing frontier.

First United States Survey of Red River

In 1823 an expedition under Major Stephen H. Long was sent to explore and survey the St. Peter's (Minnesota) river, the Red river valley and the international boundary between Red river and Lake Superior. On the St. Peter's and in the upper valley of the Red, the party travelled through undisputed Sioux territory, a garden-like region where the meadow grass grew taller than a man and gnarled orchards of wild fruit trees tumbled down sunny slopes carpeted with wild rose and tiger lily.

The Dakota warriors, half naked in the drowsy summer heat, wearing little looking glasses and papers of pins to supplement their savage ornament and live sparrow hawks on their heads, made friendly advances; their women, disfigured in calico or woolen cloth, peered curiously through the cracks in the lodges where the white men were entertained at successive feasts of buffalo, boiled roots and dog meat.

On a wooded hilltop overlooking the head waters of Red river, the party was welcomed by Wanotan, the spectacular chieftain of the local tribe, and we are again reminded of the sense of form



Schoolcraft's History of American Indians

The Valley of the St. Peter's (Minnesota) River

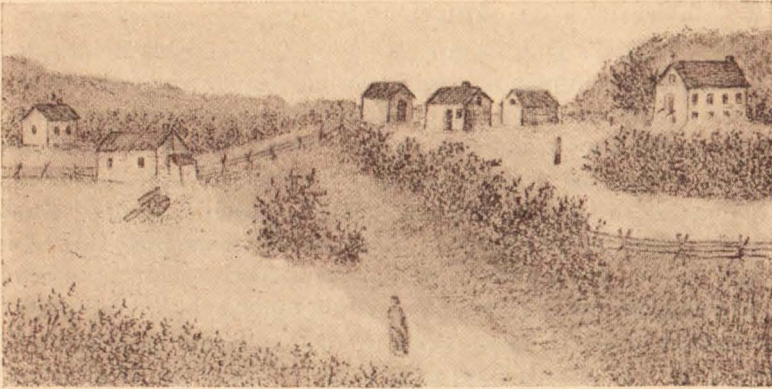
and social etiquette and the personal dignity of the American Indian before he became too familiar with white men's ways.

At eighteen this chief had established his flawless bravery, indifference to pain and that fidelity to his word which was characteristic of certain tribes of the Dakotahs. He made a perilous journey into Chippewa country and vowed, should he return in safety, to perform the sun dance, and to reduce himself to poverty. Performing the sun dance involved swinging from ropes thrust through the flesh of breast and forearms till the muscles were torn loose. This he unpleasantly carried out, and then completed the oblation by giving away his lodge, horses, dogs and all his belongings.

Time, however, seems to have restored him to prosperity for Major Long found him enjoying all the pomp and circumstance appropriate to his rank.

The leaders of the party were invited by Wanotan to dine. In a large pavilion formed by joining several of the leather lodges, he received them; buffalo robes were spread on the well swept ground and burning sweet grass perfumed the air. In honor of his guests Wanotan had assumed a strange semblance of civilized attire—a shirt of sprigged muslin, blue and scarlet military coat, cloth cap, painted Mackinac blanket, leggings and breech clout of scarlet and blue cloth. His little son sat by him in miniature Prussian uniform coat like his father's and a round hat with silver cockade!

The next day Wanotan made his visit of ceremony to the white



From an Old Sketch

Vahalla in 1866

camp. He came in the full splendor of a Dakotah chief; flowing mantle of white buffalo skins tufted with owl feathers—the “feather mantle” recorded by the very earliest explorers; moccasins ornamented with the plumage of birds, jacket and leggings of soft tanned leather trimmed with human hair; around his neck a necklace of sixty grizzly bear claws, and nine sticks painted with vermilion thrust into his hair telling the number of wounds he had received in battle. His face was painted with elaborate designs and in his hand he waved a great turkey feather fan.

Like a king he stood aloof while his warriors danced their war dance and sang of their martial exploits, omitting for the occasion—the narrator observes—any mention of the white men or half breeds killed by them about Pembina.

Again Wanotan’s son was with him, swallowed up in a dress of a white doe skin and ermine many sizes too big for him, and his father’s war bonnet of eagle feathers—rather touchingly reminiscent of our little boys who inherit too early somebody’s else long trousers.

When Long established the position of the International boundary of Red river, Pembina was found to lie in United States territory. A great many Métis had settled there and a Catholic Mission had been established among them. Many of them coerced, it is said, by the Hudson’s Bay Company now crossed the border into the sphere of its jurisdiction.



Schoolcraft's History of American Indians

The Valley of the St. Peter's (Minnesota) River

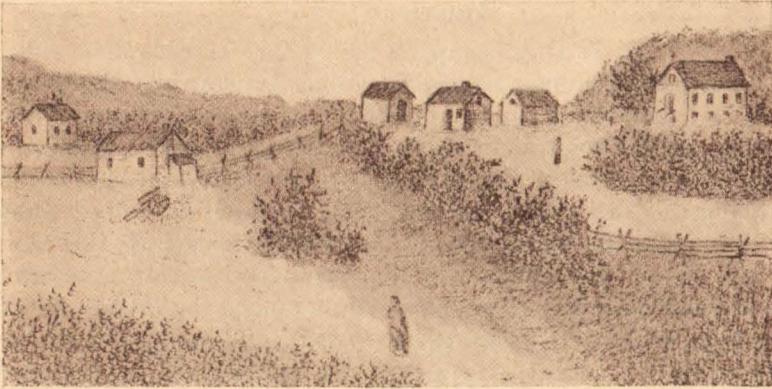
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"Is it Joe Rolette or a fire?" the inhabitants of the little ice locked city asked when, giving the *voyageur cri de joie* he swept up the quiet main street. Convivial spirits streamed after him to the Fuller or American House where Rolette danced war dances and Red river jigs and sang the songs of the North, and champagne flowed with a freedom characteristic of that casual period.

He is said to have been occasionally smitten with an illness of which nothing could be learned except that Rolette said it was the Kangaroo. He was made member of the territorial legislature of Minnesota, to the activities of which his only contributions seems to have been frequent motions to adjourn, a habit of introducing his half savage huskies into the council room and his famous exploit of running off with the bill providing for removal of the capital from St. Paul to St. Peter.

The Indians called him *Prairie-Chicken's-Son*, because of his quick light step on the trail. He loved the Indian ways, the gypsy camps of the half breed buffalo hunters, the *voyageur* songs, the stirring beat of Indian drums, and, above all, the prairie with its wide horizons, its smell of sun-dried grass, its thud and thunder of the buffalo legions.

He fed the starving Chippewas when their wild rice crops failed; he wasted his substance on fast horses and the lavish hospitality of the frontier, and in true copy-book style he died poor and sad, with failing hearing and eyesight gone, when only a little beyond middle age. He was buried at Pembina by the Red River of the North, where the great plains he loved sweep westward like a quiet sea.

It was Rolette's chief, Norman W. Kittson, who inaugurated



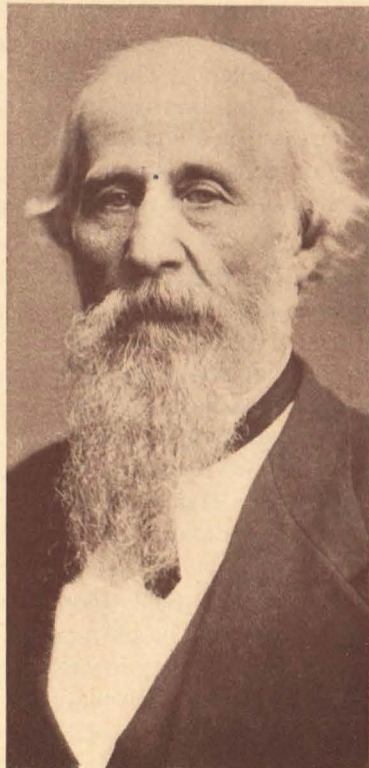
From Painting in Minnesota Club, St. Paul
Joe Rolette

regular cart traffic between Red River at Pembina and the Mississippi. He also established a permanent post some thirty miles west of Pembina on Pembina River. A year or so later a Catholic Mission was established there and a community consisting largely of half-breeds grew up at this place. It was called St. Joseph and is now the town of Walhalla on the Great Northern Railway. Kittson belonged to an old fur trading family of Canada and was a far abler and more impressive figure than the picturesque Rolette.

In 1843, soon after his arrival in the Pembina country, Kittson sent six ox carts loaded with fine furs and pemmican to the American Fur Company's headquarters at the mouth of the St. Peter's river. Until that time the little traffic that existed had been intermittent and unorganized. Now the creaking trains which plodded southward each year cutting deep furrows into the rich black soil of the valley were to increase in size until the Red river trails were among the most important commercial highways of the Northwest.

The accompanying map shows the various routes and how closely they were paralleled by the first railroad in Minnesota, known successively as the St. Paul and Pacific, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba, and the Great Northern.

As Marathons of patience and endurance these ox cart journeys are almost unequalled. Besides the difficulties common to all the routes—bad roads, absence of bridges, the peculiarly violent and often fatal thunder storms and cyclones common to the region at that time, and the devouring legions of mosquitoes which inspired the most impassioned eloquence in the contemporary writers, there were drawbacks special to each of the



Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society
Norman W. Kittson

several routes. The prairie trail west of the river through Dakota suffered from an inconvenient scarcity of wood and water and was at different periods menaced by hostile Sioux. The route east of the river which skirted the forests was pock marked with bottomless mud holes and in later years miles of corduroy jolted the travellers through tamarack swamps.

On the Red river trails was heard the Canadian patois, characteristic and full of savor. The buffalo hide cordage which formed the harness and bound the cart together and which, rapped about trees, eased the carts down and hauled them up sharp embankments, was "shagganappe;" deer skin strings were "babiche;" the boiled pemmican thickened with flour which formed the main dish at noon camps was "rubaboo." For some reason pemmican was boiled at noon and fried at night.

In spite of carts dragged with broken axles out of sloughs, of river crossings accomplished "in a cloud of mosquitoes, flies, mud and untranslatable language," of the heat and the storms, a certain gypsy-like charm was conceded to these journeys by the early travellers. The memory of discomforts receded and there remained an impression of the gay, courteous, dark skinned teamsters, of moonlit nights sped with fiddles and dancing, of long days on the shimmering prairie where silvery grass rippled in the fresh sweet scented breeze.

Old Ways and New

North of the border the Selkirk settlements grew and at last prospered. Peaceful villages, schools, churches and a convent appeared on the lower Red river. A pastoral and unique way of life developed there. There were no lawyers and few laws; no criminals, no locks and keys, and no need for them; no wealth and no real poverty except among the more shiftless of the Métis and this was mutually relieved. No one was too poor to have a fast horse, a crack dog team and a gayly bedecked cariole: horse racing and dancing of a home-made, innocuous kind were the chief diversions.

The settlers' fields bloomed; their granaries were well filled; cattle lowed in the barn yards; a loom and spinning wheel were to be found in every low rafted kitchen—Utopia in a way, a homely, rustic Utopia, and Selkirk's impatient benevolence vindicated at last.

Elegance and the great world were represented by Fort Garry, the Hudson's Bay Company headquarters. This organization

had taken over the Selkirk interests in 1835 and Assiniboia was once more, in fact as well as practice, a part of Rupert's Land. A local council was appointed to govern the settlements but it was made up entirely of men in some way connected with the company.

The Métis, more particularly the French half breeds who were of the Catholic religion, remained distinct and alien, resenting this overlordship. In 1849 they rebelled against what they considered an especially tyrannical measure. The 200-year-old feudal rights of the Hudson's Bay Company were becoming less and less easy to define and to enforce and the officials were glad to smooth the matter over, leaving the Métis virtually victorious.

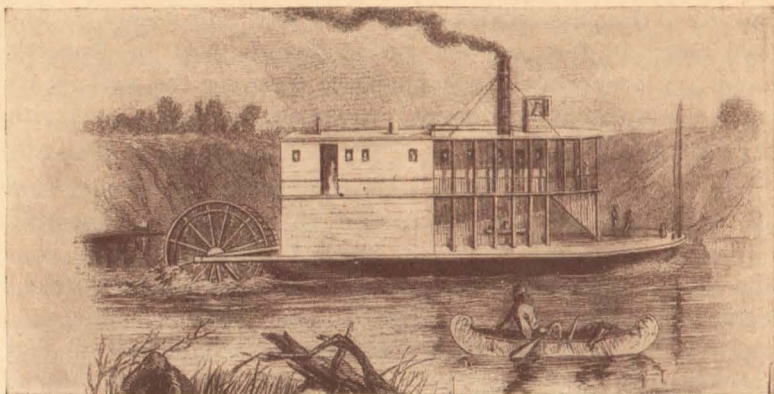
In 1857 the traffic over the Red river trails was greatly increased. In that year the old company exchanged the difficult canoe route to Hudson's Bay for ox cart transportation along the level plains of Red river.

It sent its furs to St. Paul whence they were shipped by steamboat and railway to the Eastern seaboard and to Europe. Goods from England were also sent to Fort Garry via St. Paul.

While a pastoral community with its almost biblical method of transportation was developing in this strangely isolated valley, conditions in the outside world were being revolutionized by railroads. The American government sent out expeditions to explore for a route to the Pacific; British engineers studied the problem of linking by modern transportation methods the Red river settlements and the great plains beyond with the civilized Canada of the St. Lawrence.

Because of the increased traffic over Red river trails when the Hudson's Bay Company altered its commercial route and to accommodate the prospectors who in the late fifties began pouring through St. Paul bound for the newly discovered gold fields of Western Canada, it was decided to attempt steamboat travel on Red river.

A steamer was sent up the Mississippi beyond St. Cloud, taken apart, loaded on ox- and horse-drawn sleighs and hauled across frozen lakes and snow-choked forests to Georgetown, originally a Hudson's Bay station (near Moorhead) on Red river. There she was put together, given the name of the owner, Anson Northrup, and in the high water time of spring made a round trip to Fort Garry and the Selkirk settlements. From that time until supplanted by railroads, steamboats operated regularly between



From an old print

The Anson Northrup

Fort Garry and Fort Abercrombie (near Breckenridge), and Fisher's Landing on Red Lake river. Carts, teams or stage coaches completed the journey to the Mississippi.

Minnesota in the meantime, caught the railroad fever of the time. Five land grant companies were chartered in 1857. One of these was ambitiously called the Minnesota and Pacific. Its immediate objective, however, was not the Pacific, but the border town of St. Vincent, the traffic to which it aspired was that which passed in ever increasing volume over the Red river trails.

Owing to the inexperienced and not always scrupulous methods of the day, construction was incredibly delayed and it was not until ten years later that the railroad reached St. Cloud, 75 miles above St. Paul, where it received the freight brought by steamboat and cart from Pembina and the Selkirk community.

The valley had now become one of the important highways of the West; south of the border, however, its amazing richness was ignored and it remained only a highway.

The settlements were few and in their infancy. A log hut to serve as way station on the mail route between Fort Garry and Fort Abercrombie was built at the mouth of the Red Lake river in 1868. A few traders, trappers and river men settled in the vicinity and when the following year it was decided to establish a post office at this place no better name could be found than the historic Grandes Fourches or Grand Forks, by which the locality has so long been known.

In 1871 a white settler invaded what was then part of a Sioux Indian reservation and built the first house on the site of Fargo,



From Harper's New Monthly Magazine

An Ox Cart Train

North Dakota. He was soon joined by others and a small community sprang up called Centralia until the following year when the name Fargo was officially bestowed. Indian title to the land pre-empted was extinguished and a year later the settlers received valid titles to their property.

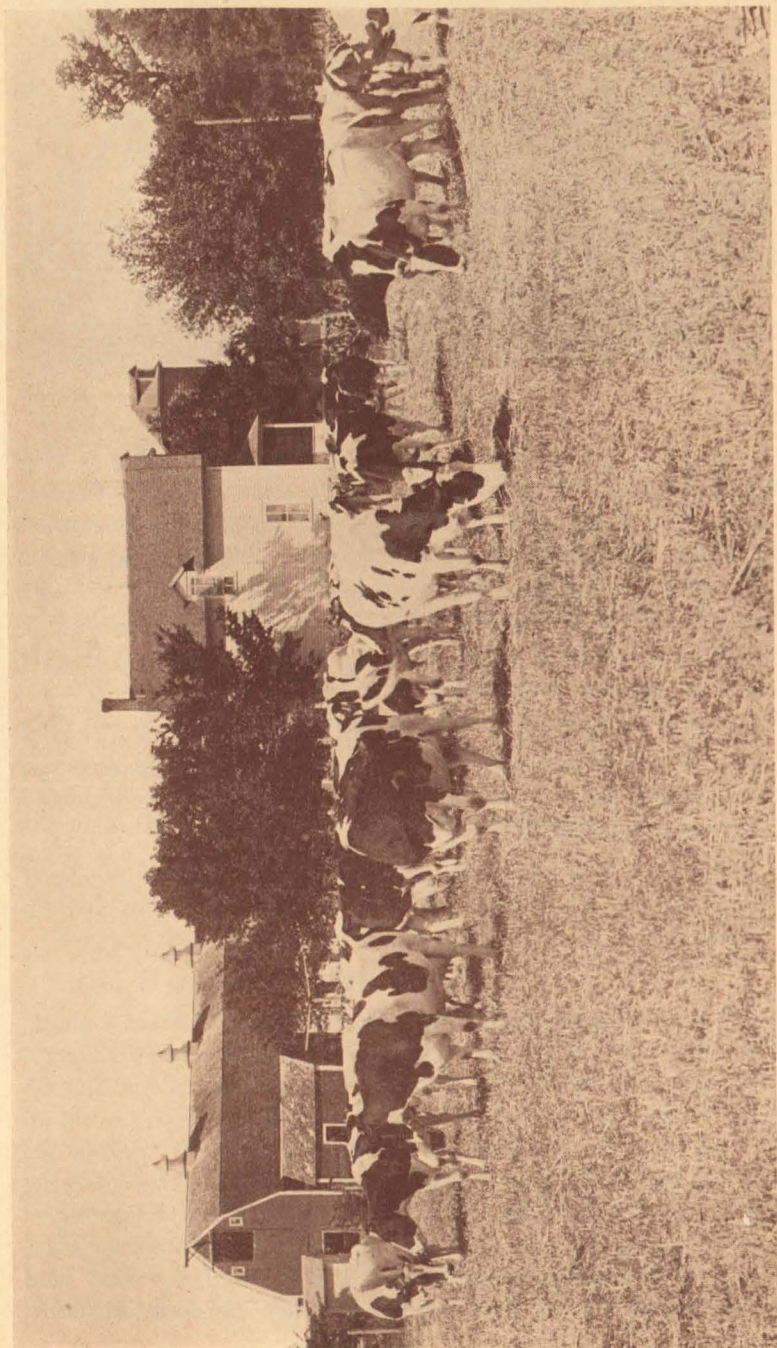
The town of Moorhead across the river in Minnesota also came into being at this time.

North of these embryo cities, until Pembina and St. Vincent were reached, was only the tiny community of Georgetown where Hudson's Bay Company trade was transferred to and from steamboats to Red river carts.

But the greatest era in the eventful history of the Red River Valley was already at hand and we find men of peculiar distinction and ability concerned in that development.

James J. Hill

In 1857 an eighteen-year-old boy came from Eastern Canada to St. Paul intending to go by Red river cart train to Fort Garry. There he was to visit a schoolboy friend and perhaps journey on to the Pacific where he might work his way around the world on some sailing vessel. When he arrived, the last cart train of the year had left, so he was stranded in St. Paul until the following spring. He found work on the levee—the head of navigation—and by spring he was too hard at work to think of leaving. Later and many times he went to Red river—went by every kind of conveyance and in every kind of weather—on foot, on horse-



Dairying is Now an Important Industry in the Red River Valley

back, by dog sledge, by cart, by steamboat, by stage and finally by his own railroad, for the boy was James J. Hill.

For sixty years he was engaged in transportation in the Northwest. During the winters of the earlier period when the frozen Mississippi stopped the boats, he made trips into the north country and bought furs which came out in the spring. He also dealt in grain and salt and fuel, but always one way or another he was interested in shipping. A large part of the Mississippi river cargoes came from the Red river country, so that trade was watched with keenest interest. Nor had he failed to observe that the rich glacial lake bed was potentially far more than a mere highway between Winnipeg or Pembina and the Mississippi river. The heavy laden carts had cut deep ruts in a soil which would, he knew, make the Red river valley a Mecca for future agriculturists.

The winter of 1869-70 saw the peaceful Red river settlements in the clutch of a miniature revolution.

After many negotiations certain portions of Rupert's Land most suitable for settlement and agriculture were, in the late sixties, transferred from the control of the Hudson's Bay Company to the Dominion of Canada. Chief among these were the fertile acres of Assiniboia. And now the "free people," who for three generations had rebelled against the old company, rose in open revolution against the proposed withdrawal of its authority. They misunderstood the real nature of the transaction and saw in it a threat of losing their land and the independence they had maintained in spite of the much resented restrictions.

Their leader was a French half breed, named Louis Riel, and under him a very real and for a time successful revolution was staged. The governor sent out by Canada was summarily turned back from the border and forced, after a humiliating sojourn at Pembina, to return to lower Canada. Riel took possession of Fort Garry and called himself and his followers the president and representatives of French-speaking people in Rupert's Land; later he proclaimed himself president of a provisional republic.

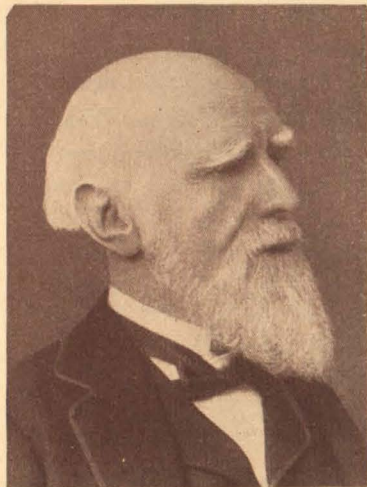
It was chiefly due to the good offices of a mediator sent out from Pembina that the affair, which was not without its baptism of blood, failed to attain even more serious proportions. This man was Donald A. Smith, a Hudson's Bay Company official, who for almost twenty years had been chief factor in Labrador.

His wisdom, firmness and good judgment tided matters over and later troops were sent out from Canada to restore order.

Fifteen years later the half breeds of the Saskatchewan, many of them Red river Métis who had left Manitoba, made their last pitiful gesture as "free people," or rather, as an individual people. Again the country had been opened to settlement and the half breeds had received no assurance that they would not lose the lands on which they had settled and to which they felt they had a peculiar right.

They turned to the man who had led the Red river revolt, Louis Riel. He had taken refuge in the United States and was at this time (1884) living with his wife on Sun river, in the eastern foothills of the Rockies, and teaching in the industrial school of St. Peter's mission. This mission was situated near where the Great Northern Railway crosses Sun river, not far from the present city of Great Falls, Montana. At first Riel declined to participate in the affair, but he could not long resist the impassioned plea sent him by the people of his race. He returned to Canada and the affair ripened into armed revolt.

A curious note of hysteria characterizes the movement. It became not only a demand for patents to lands, provision for schools and so forth, but an obscure and inarticulate plea for some kind of conceded authenticity as a race apart, with special rights and special needs.



From J. G. Pyle's *Life of James J. Hill*
Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal

Riel's brain became crowded with religious phantasms, and when the inevitable end of the tragic effort came, he sat in the court room praying and announcing himself the prophet of the New World. It was thus he received the sentence of death.

Coming of the Railroad

Mr. Hill, whose interests at the time of the first Riel rebellion were so largely bound up with the commerce of the Red river, decided to go to Fort Garry and see the situation at first hand.

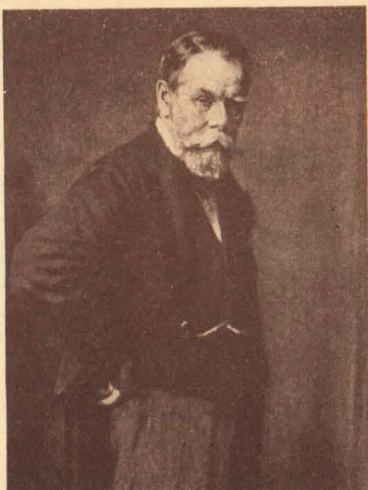
He was also determined to secure for his Red river steamer and ox cart line, as well as his Mississippi river boats, some of the Hudson's Bay Company's freight. He was certain that he could handle it for less than they could themselves. So he set out with a dog team early in 1870.

The Hudson's Bay Company official, Donald A. Smith, having completed his work as mediator and having heard of the young man Hill, who was so extensively in the transportation business, started for St. Paul to see him. Then came a blizzard and these two men, both travelling by dog sledge on the prairie, one going north and one south—each with the same idea in mind—to see the other about improved transportation—met and made camp together in the storm.

The immediate result was a bargain for handling all the Red river freight by one company to be managed by Mr. Hill. The rate was to be lower than ever before—\$1.00 per cwt. from Fort Garry to Fort Abercrombie (Breckenridge). The arrangement proved satisfactory and the friendship begun under these strange circumstances strengthened with time. This meeting was not only dramatic; in its consequences it proved one of the most important events in the history of the Northwest.

In the meantime railway tracks had been creeping slowly and haltingly westward from the Mississippi. Railroad building was at that time financed largely by government aid and subsidy and often carried on by men more intent on speculating in land grants and bond issues than in developing either the railroad itself or the country from which its revenue must come. When the financial storm of 1873 struck the flimsy structures behind these ventures, it brought many of them to bankruptcy and ruin.

James J. Hill, experienced now in every phase of the local transportation business, had what at that time was the uncommon common sense to perceive that the worth of a railroad was its



From J. G. Pyle's *Life of James J. Hill*
Lord Mount Stephen

ability to earn rather than its ability to borrow. He knew the potential wealth of this northwestern country; he clearly foresaw its great future and that of its unfinished railway systems—and that the country and the railways would be dependent upon each other.

Conspicuous among the failures of 1873 was the St. Paul and Pacific, the first railroad in Minnesota. Ten miles of bumpy iron track had been built in 1862 between St. Paul and St. Anthony, and had gradually crept north and west from there. It was poorly built and staggering under a crushing load of debt, but of supreme interest to Mr. Hill because of its charter to build to and down the Red river valley to St. Vincent, just across the border from Manitoba.

Nothing but economy, experience and expert knowledge of the country could rehabilitate and complete such a road and make it pay. But, sure of his own capacities, and of the resources of the country, it became Mr. Hill's great purpose to buy this road.

His sympathetic confidant in early railroad plans was Norman W. Kittson. They had become friends and associates soon after Mr. Hill's arrival in St. Paul and later were partners in the forwarding business, owning together the Red River Transportation Company.

A railroad from the head of navigation on the Mississippi to St. Vincent or Pembina, which could connect with a line built southward from Winnipeg, was as important to the growing communities north as it was to those south of the border. And we are



Steamboats Docking at Grand Forks

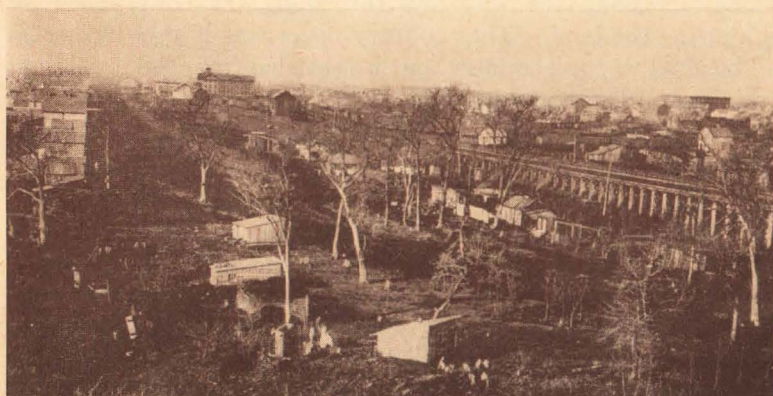
not surprised to find the names of two men prominent in Canadian affairs in the syndicate of four, which in 1878 was to buy the defunct road and create the new organization known as the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba. These four men were James J. Hill, Norman W. Kittson, Donald A. Smith and George Stephen.

Few men could have been found so well fitted for the enterprise. Smith knew the Canadian, as Hill and Kittson knew the American, Northwest; this intimate knowledge of the country, their confidence in each other and in the undertaking, enabled them with the help of Stephen, whose contribution was his banking connections, to put through the project.

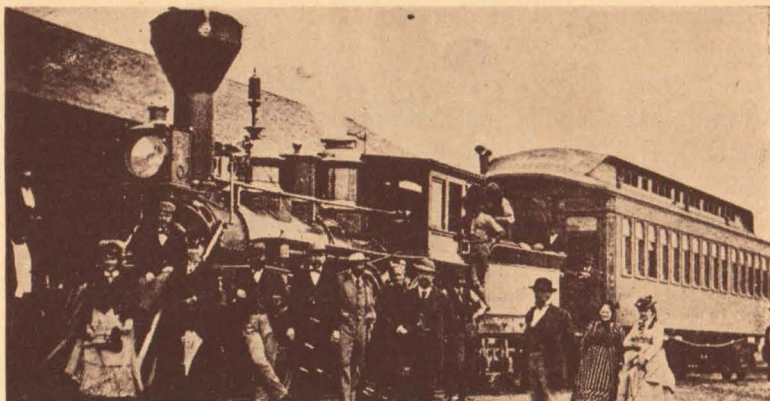
Two of those who thus planned an international rail line connecting Manitoba with the Twin Cities, remained Canadians throughout the long, eventful lives that were to follow. And not without due honor, for George Stephen became Lord Mount Stephen, and Smith, Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, and the Hudson's Bay Company's greatest governor.

The bankrupt road they bought had about 450 miles in all, extending by way of St. Anthony, Willmar, Breckenridge and Barnesville to Crookston. There was also a line to St. Cloud and Melrose, and other bits of track still unconnected.

Mr. Hill had built 15 miles of road from Crookston to Fisher's Landing where the boats of the Red River Transportation



Fargo in 1879



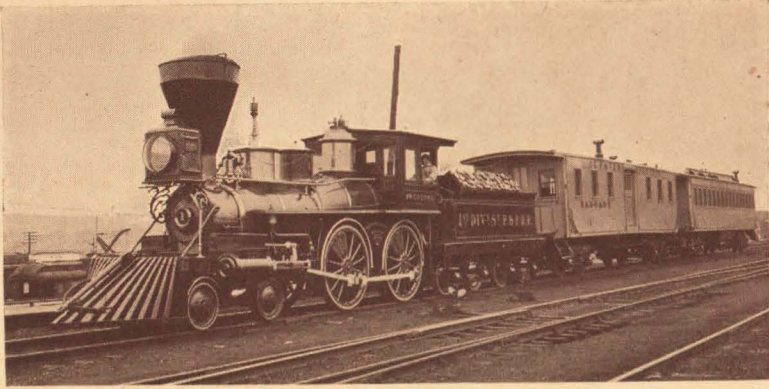
The First Train Into Morris, Minn.

Company came from Winnipeg. This was in reality his first railroad.

Later these lines, knit together into a system and become the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba, were to expand through all the Red river country, all of Minnesota north of the Twin Cities, push across North Dakota and to Helena and Butte in Montana, then, becoming Great Northern, to strike out from Havre and reach the Pacific Northwest.

As the first occupation of the country—that of fur trading—gave way to permanent agriculture, old means of travel were changed for new. Cart trails gave way to steel rails. In all that country west from the Red river the railroad truly was the pioneer, blazing the way and furnishing the conveyance for colonizing the land. That country never was in any true sense a “covered wagon” country, but was settled from the immigrant train drawn by the locomotive.

The first Chief Engineer of the St. Paul & Pacific was William Crooks, the man who drove the first spike in the first railroad west of St. Paul in 1862. The famous first locomotive in Minnesota—the William Crooks—which, with its kind, had so much to do with the settling of our Northwest, was named for him. Ramsay Crooks, his father, was one of the great figures of the fur trade. He was a member of the party which crossed the continent in 1811 to establish a trading post at Astoria. Later he was the active manager of the American Fur Company, succeeding John Jacob Astor when the latter retired in 1834. He was early



The William Crooks

to see that the railroads, which could be built almost everywhere through the country, promised to become the most important factor in our national growth and in 1833 he became President of the Mohawk & Hudson Railroad, one of the first railroad companies chartered in the United States. This road was one of the units which made up the great system of the New York Central, as the St. Paul & Pacific was the forerunner of the Great Northern.

The evolution of the railway car has aptly been traced from the invention of the wheel: "The wheel became a cart, the cart a coach, the coach a railway train." It might also have been said, "first the log became a wheel." Similarly the railway track may be traced from the foot prints of the pioneer in the wilderness; these became a path, the path a trail, the trail a railway track. Nowhere is this evolution more strikingly apparent than in the valley of the Red River of the North and no one had a greater or more honorable part in it than James J. Hill.

FINIS

